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MEMORIES OF CUBA

JANAN EWYN

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MEMORIES OF CUBA

and Other Poems

Janan Ewyn

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The Gorham Press

1908

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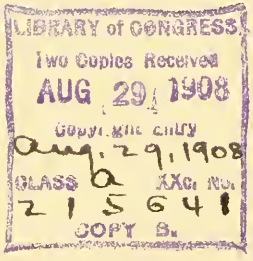

The Gorham Press, Boston, U. S. A.

To the beautiful South, and to all people and lands who still have time for the beauty and poetry of life.

J. E.

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CUBAN SONGS

CIEGO DE AVILA

THE isles of the tropic seas are fair;
For earth and sea and sky are rare
With radiant color and ardent sun.
In drowsy languor, one by one,
The days drift by, all unaware
Of larger worlds with hurry and care;
And sigh and smile
The time beguile
In lazy sweetness beyond compare.

O the noons, with their hush and heat,
With never a breath to say how sweet
Is the orange flower or the southern rose
Or the jasmine white, as its stars unclose
The first soft drops of rain to greet!
While heaven and earth in silence meet,
And a dreaming calm,
Like an eastern balm,
Quiets the throb of the pulse's beat.

But 'tis the nights that are Cuba's pride,
With their thousand stars, and moon like a bride
Throwing the mist of her wedding veil
Over the landscape pure and pale.
The royal palms sway to and fro;
The night breeze comes from Jucaro
With the memory
Of the breath of the sea;
In the southern sky, the cross hangs low.

Ciego de Avila, Cuba, 1902.

LA PINTURITA

A BIT of sky, a bit of sky,
Glowing in evening splendor,
A drift of blue and a dash of gold
And a rose-tint — warm and tender.

A bit of sky, a southern sky,
Slowly, surely paling
Into opal tints of a woman's gem,
With threads of white lace trailing.

A southern sky, a Cuban sky,
A sigh of expectation.
The evening star comes slowly out
With beauteous scintillation.

A Cuban sky, an evening star
In tropic splendor glowing.
The first faint curve of a fair young moon
Her silver circle showing.

A bit of sky, a star, a moon,
With perfect beauty calling
And holding each enraptured sense.
A hush — then darkness falling.

Ciego de Avila, Cuba, 1902.

EL DANZON

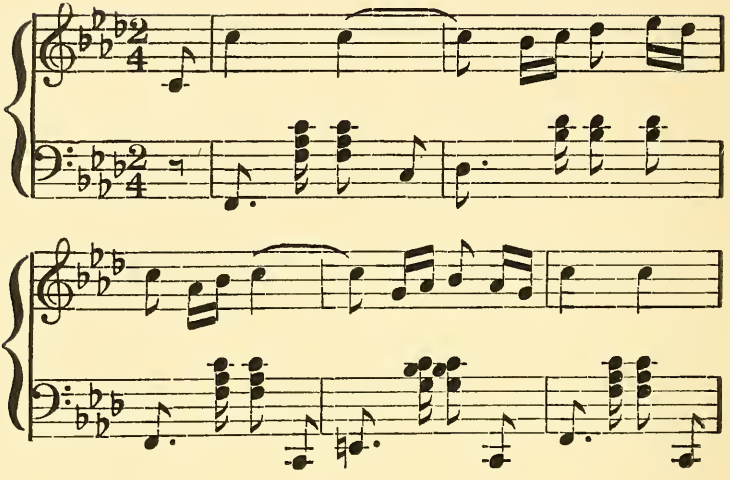
VIVA la Cuba!
O land of my dreaming,
Where blue skies are smiling
And dark eyes are gleaming!
I sing to fair Cuba
And, Rosa, to you,
With the love of my heart —
¡La estrella eres tu!

¡Rosa, Rosita,
Ah, mi amorita,
Muy linda, chiquita!
¿Donde eres tu, mi Rosa?
¡Bailanda mariposa,
Cubanita muy hermosa,
Rosa, Rosita!

¡Viva la Cuba!
And may her warm beauty
Call daughters to love her
And sons to their duty!
My love and my duty
I left on her shore
With sweet, dusky Rosa.
¡Viva la amor!

Rosa, Rosita, etc

Keota, Oklahoma, 1908.

LA HABANERA

Maria, tender memories come with the strain
Of this low habanera, and I feel I would fain
Be in Cuba, with youth and the past once again.

The night wind seems to breathe through the
palms, from the sea,
And this low habanera brings thy dear face to me.
Lost beyond my recalling, its sweet ministry!

All dusky is the soft hair, and blown by the wind
Into tendrils of beauty — fitting frame for the
kind
Flower-like face, and the blue of the eyes,
love-enshrined.

A laddie, I had roamed over lakeside and hill
Of my fair native highlands, with no guide
but my will
And no love but for Scotland my young heart
to fill.

With light step, and as free as the young deer
that go
Through the green shade and sunshine, did
my heart ever know
Any shadow, or fear any future that fate could
bestow?

Maria, bonny lassie and bride of my dreams,
Dear old Scotland ne'er saw thee, and the
southern cross gleams
Where I met thee and loved thee — and lost
thee, it seems.

Maria, how we danced in the perfume and
light
To this low habanera! And the day and the
night
Came and went but to love thee and woo thee
a-right.

Ah, lassie, must I lose thee for ay! The reply
Of the sad habanera only echoes my cry.
O my ain wee bit lassie, my love till I die!

Keota, Oklahoma, 1908.

THE LITTLE GREEN COTTAGE

THERE comes a time, in these Indian lands, in the month of February, when winter sleeps; when a dream of spring comes over the land; when the moon hangs golden and full; and when the breeze that comes over the southern hills is like the claret of Spain — so clear and sweet — and it seems to hold within it the intoxicating breath of the sea.

It is a night to conjure with. I throw wide the double doors at both ends of my long hall, and the fireshine and the moonshine follow each other softly about the room — from piano keys to candlesticks, to the old brass andirons, to the top of the big round table, and then in a confusion of beauty, to the smooth bare floor. I draw my low chair to the open door and I shut my eyes. It is then that the dream comes.

The breeze that sweeps past me is the fresh salt of the Mexican Sea or of the broad Atlantic beyond. There is a village, a tiny one, with red tiled roofs glooming in the moonlight, against a background of royal palms. A blaze of light comes down the street from the plaza square, and the breeze brings a faint danzon, mingled with its perfume of jasmine and laurel. From a barred window, as I pass, comes a high passionate soprano, upheld by the rhythm of the piano's habanera —

"En Cuba, isla hermosa del ardiente sol," and

"Entre todas las flores, la Reina eres tu." I look beyond the houses, beyond the palm-leaf huts, to the sweep of the old Spanish trocha, and into my soul sinks the beauty of the perfect night, and the ever-living charm of this Spanish-America wakes again. My heart answers the passionate unknown voice. "La Reina eres tu! " Ah yes, surely, "La Reina eres tu!"

I do not linger in the street nor in the plaza. The charming sight is not new to me. In every city, town, and village of the little island, the same happy gayety goes on. The throb and beat of the tropical music, the gay frocks and laughing faces, the care-free happiness of the Cuban evening, is not a thing to forget. It is all pleasant to my loving eyes, but I do not linger. I am going to call upon Madame.

We all called her Madame, in those days; and we admired her, or feared her sharp eyes and tongue, according to the place and occasion. She was very kind to me and I loved her. She stood to me for the great old world beyond the Atlantic — the beautiful world of my dreams, that I might never see. In that world, she, the beautiful French woman, had lived her life of courts and cities in many a fair land.

She delighted my feminine fancy with gorgeous gowns from Paris, hand-wrought lingerie from the deft fingers of the French nuns, and with long soft sables from Russia.

Her rooms were my delight. Some of them were piled with trunks and chests, but the large living-room was filled with curious and lovely things. Rarely beautiful embroideries and china and silver filigree from Shanghai, and from the neighboring islands of Japan; fans and inlaid tables and priceless draperies from European cities — all were there; and music and laughter and conversation and song from the whole, wide wonderful world. I was young, then, and I loved it all. I love it all to-day, for I am still young. "Those whom the gods love, die young, no matter how long they live," says our Fra Elbertus.

We were all strangers to the little village, we who gathered in her rooms. Some of us were from the United States, some from Canada, some from England, Scotland, Spain, or the islands of the sea. We were in this village for many and varied reasons, but we all belonged to the "headquarters" of the Company. What Company, or for what purpose, matters not. My husband was one of the Company's men as was Madame's son; and it was to be with this loved and only son that Madame braved the ennui of a Cuban village. And my husband and I? We were there because the opportunity offered, and we wished to go. Youth needs no excuse for *going*.

So I call upon Madame, and I look into the proud face with its crown of silver hair, seeking the kindly smile that is ever for me; imagining, with happiest fancy, her great beauty when the silver hair was auburn and the still lovely eyes held the blue fire of youthful spirit. She tells me again the tales of her far-off world, and I listen, bound in the spell of their fascination.

As I listen, comes another picture. I see a southern town, my old home town; I walk its streets with my lover-husband, and I tell him, passionately, what my life shall be. A little home in some new southwestern town? No, no! My whole nature rises in revolt. The thought of the trivial existence catches my heart with dread. Surely, that is not for me. A little home-making, a little needlework, a little calling upon one's friends, some entertaining and being entertained, will tell away the wasted opportunities of a woman's life. The sight of such towns, as I had caught from the vantage ground of a rapidly moving train, had been far from inspiring. So when the tender face looks down into mine, upturned, and the kind voice that I know so well says gently, "Then what do you want to do, Sweetheart?"; I return the look with a rueful smile, but answer firmly, nevertheless, "Indeed, I do not know, but not that! Oh, not that!"

And now I look at Madame, after her lifetime spent in living my dreams, amid the scenes for which I long — not for the gowns and courts do I yearn so wistfully, although they are enticing in their way; but for the setting of splendid cities with their culture of ancient learning, with their treasuries of pictures and architecture, each added beauty broadening the mental horizon until all that is selfish and provincial shall fade away, until I am no longer only a Southerner, only an American, but a World's woman.

Madame has been a very happy woman, she is happy to-day, and her life is bright before her. But I begin to see, dimly, that her life is not for me; for, in it, there is no abiding place. France is not her home, although it holds the homes and history of her kindred; Spain is not her home, although within it lie the honored statesmen who have left their legacy of intellect, position and courtly courtesy to the General, her husband; nor are the cities nor the courts her home, although in them she has shone so brilliantly and well.

I realize in one flash of wisdom that, for me and my race, it is the home first and then the world. I know that man is, in truth, "a land animal," and that while he is young must he send down those vigorous roots into the soil of his own land that will hold him upright through the buffet of all life-winds; or that will

make green and generous the flowering of his nature, under whatsoever sun of prosperity and plenty. He must build his home in his youth. No money can buy it in after years. It must grow with his growth and broaden with his life. It must be built upon the traditions of his family and contain the memories and loved belongings of his grandsires. And as the years go by, may the old furniture grow still more old, and may the floors be worn with the coming of those he loves, until the happiness of such a home shall overflow into the lives of those who greet him. Then is he ready for the beauties that the great world holds for him.

Many may have both; but I, perchance, may have only one. And my dream is sweet with the light of our undertaking as, like the happy birds, we plan to build our nest in the springtime.

So we built the little green cottage among the forest trees in this new land which is a part of our home land. On a hill, overlooking a wide green valley, it stands almost unnoticed behind its screen of trees, and its plain square sides give small promise of the abundance of roomy comfort within. It is true, that the veranda has a hospitable air, most inviting, but you must not wait outside. The long hall holds out its arms to you, as you enter, begging that you rest in its cool shadow, if the day be warm; or if winter be king, bidding

you to a shelter before the warmth and cheer of its great log fire. The books and pictures bid you to remain and the loved piano still hums softly the last tender notes of a Chopin Etûde, for your greeting. Perhaps the big black hound will rise with slow courtesy from his rug in front of the fire; and faces, that reflect the contentment of happy hearts, will smile a hearty and a lasting welcome.

The dream is, at last, a sweet reality and as we look into each other's eyes — my lover-husband and I — we pray that those who enter may wish to stay and enjoy, with us, the quiet happiness that needs no seeking and the peace that finds its birth in harmony.

A single memory will come of one who did not wish to stay and whose parting words have called up many a smile for those who live in the little green cottage. "How can you live here on the edge of the world and bury yourselves forever?" she said. How much, how very much she had to learn! The world shut out? How could it be so, with magazines and papers piled upon my tables; with rows of friends in their comfortable bindings, standing upon my library shelves; and each one in our small circle bringing a bit of the outside world to the cottage? Each one, in his turn, goes into the big working world, taking with him the talent that has fallen to his share and

there he doubles and trebles it, if it may be, and brings it home for the pleasure and the profit of all. Thus each year the little green cottage reaches outward and upward and each year it is a step nearer its ideal.

After the happy work of each day is over, a charmed company meet in this long hall; and as the fragrant coffee sends out its invitation, the care of the day is forgotten, and wit and laughter and music make my world, not narrow, but broad and bright. It is not the point upon which I stand that makes my life poor and narrow, but the circumference of the circle with which I bound my life.

But there still comes a time in the month of February, when the dream of spring is upon the land, and the moon hangs golden and full, that the breeze from across the valley seems to bring me the breath of the sea. And my real world fades with the twilight and I sit in my low chair and dream of what has been, and what may still be in the beautiful far-off world for me.

Indian Territory, 1907.

II

FEAR

"No, let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers,
The heroes of old."

ROBERT BROWNING.

FEAR life? To know that the battle is on
And shrink from the fray,
To be given the chance, and ere it be gone
To turn cowardly away?
Niggard in effort, nor strive to attain
When the spirit shall quail;
Counting the cost to the heart and the brain
When the trial shall fail;
Fainting and weak, in despair sinking down
In the noon of life's pain!
The evening of life, my success shall yet crown.
Up, and at it again!
The darkness may gather and failure be sure
With its bitter and sting.
I still need no hope of success for a lure.
The battle's the thing!

Fear truth? to live with my heart in the past,
My mind in a mist,
Clinging to memories, sweet as the hurt
That a mother has kissed?
Never to think — to know what I know —
To feel what I feel —
Crushed by a crude superstition, lies low
Under its heel!

Never to burgeon and never to bloom
In freedom and light,
Always to feel myself breathless for room,
Groping in night,
Haunted by ghosts of a fear and a grief
That will not be laid,
Tied to the corpse of a dead belief
That my fathers have made!

Stripped of my faiths and my hopes, I shall cleave
To truth in its might.
Truth, I will have it, whatever I leave
In the thick of the fight!
Eagerly seeking, I take to the open road
And the day;
Knowing that whatever is, has been,
And shall be alway.
On the open road, with my brothers, I go
And we laugh and sing;
For truth is truth, though it's little we know.
The battle's the thing.

Keota, Oklahoma, 1908.

A VIEW OF LIFE

"Dwell up there in the simple and noble regions of thy life."

— EMERSON.

PEACE be to thee forever, O my soul!
No more shall hurt or sadness be thy meed.
No more has earth the power to rob thy state
Of aught that to thy birthright dost belong
Of kingly pomp or royal sovranty.
Supreme thou art. Thy kingdom hath arrived
And thou hast naught to do but enter in.
Joy to the world, the Lord has come indeed!
This day is thy emancipation day.
Slave to the senses, thou art bond no more;
But free. Thy freedom is thy crown.
The secret of eternal happiness
Is thine. Its only source thou hast perceived.
Ah, Soul, thou art divine — the breath of God!
Now, to thy God return and be at rest;
And, even now, that heaven is thine for which,
In vain, thou hast sought: for there is naught to do.
Rest softly; and, content within the arms
Of God, the Love, the mighty "Over-soul,"
All that is low and old shall pass away.
Behold! 'T is thus He maketh all things new!
Peace be to thee forever, O my Soul!

Forest Dale, Burlington, Iowa, 1903.

GOD'S WATCH O'ER YOU AND ME

GOD'S watch o'er you and me is in the skies,
When comes to drowsy night the dawn's first thrill;
And, when along the west the daylight dies
And stars come out, his watch is with us still.

God's watch o'er you and me is in the breeze
That whispers from the south when skies are fair,
And when the north wind bends the mighty trees
And howls along the waste, His watch is there.

God's watch o'er you and me is in the flowers
When, in His smile, they grace each sunny day;
But when the earth is bare and dreary hours
Are long, he has not turned His face away.

God's watch o'er you and me is in the heart;
For heaven is within and God is there.
So overshadowed, so of Love a part,
How can we be without His tender care!

We look not darkly through a glass; but, sure
That God is good, that we shall ever be
His own creation — ever fair and pure —
We know God watches over you and me.

We cannot say with prophet and with priest,
"Behold, our God is here! Lo, He is there!"
For there shall be no greatest and no least
When we can know that God is everywhere.

Montgomery, Alabama, 1901.

LOVE SONGS

A LOVE HYMN

BEFORE I knew what it might mean to me
To love you as I do, and in return,
To have the constant watch of your dear eyes,
Your tender care, that makes my life with you
A dream of beauty and a thing ideal;
I thought my life was happy, and I thought
My books and music and my girlish dreams,
My friends, and that sweet spirit who has taught
My girlhood mind to seek in character
The best that God makes possible to man —
I thought these were enough to make my days
A pure delight, and wished for nothing more.
For what can maidens know or dream of life
Made perfect by a lofty love like yours?
What can they know of the exalted joy
That comes to woman when she knows and feels
That every throb of the strong heart, whereon
Her head may rest in sure content and pride,
Is register of noble thoughts and pure
Resolves and actions worthy of her love?
My husband, I oft wonder why it is
That God has been so good to you and me.
My heart is one thanksgiving, and my soul
Seems running over with its weight of bliss.

This morning as I walked the garden path,
The breath of violets, so pure, so sweet,
Seemed the expression of this love of mine
Which I can find no words to tell you of.
I only hid my face among the leaves
And blossoms, asking God to take
My thankfulness, and, with it, make the earth
More glad, the skies more blue, the world more fair.
It seemed that while I prayed and thought of you,
I felt the Christmas song the angels sang
Resounding through my being, and my heart
Sang love — love to the world, to God, to you.

Montgomery, Ala., 1900.

O EYES SO BLUE AND TENDER

O EYES, so blue and tender,
In your soft depths, I see
Unselfish heart-devotion
And manly purity.
O eyes, so blue and tender!

O eyes, so blue and tender,
I live in the clear shine
Which tells me beyond doubting
That all your love is mine,
O eyes, so blue and tender!

O eyes, so blue and tender,
My world is sweet and true
And all my days are happy days —
I find my world in you —
O eyes, so blue and tender!

O eyes, so blue and tender,
Dark the hour would be
That would dim your shining —
Bitter hour for me —
O eyes, so blue and tender!

O eyes, so blue and tender,
So tender and so blue!
I find my hope of earth and heaven
With the love-light shining through
In eyes so blue and tender.

"*Forest Dale*," *Burlington, Iowa*, 1903.

TO K.K.P.

THE spring is calling you, my darling,
And the little early flowers,
The south wind from across the valley,
And the long bright hours.
The hills, the hills are calling to you
And the sweet new grass's sheen.
The trees, don't you hear them calling, calling,
From our wood-walk's sheltering green?

Our hearts are always calling you, my darling,
The ebb and flow of tide
Is not more constant than our loving,
Is not more constant than our longing.
Oh! The world could give us nothing, darling,
Could we be side by side!

Keota, Oklahoma, April 1907.

MONTGOMERY SONGS

A LOVE SONG

To E. H. McC.

FAR from thy pleasant walks, Montgomery,
I fain, I fain would see thee once again.
Far from thy gracious hills, Montgomery,
No pleasure can I find in wood or plain.

Far from thy breezes soft, Montgomery,
I still can smell the breath of violet bloom;
And from thy sunny walls, Montgomery,
I think I smell the rose's rich perfume.

Far from thy piny woods, Montgomery,
I still see lilies blossom, side by side;
And in my sweetest dreams, Montgomery,
I pluck thy wild flowers for the Eastertide.

Far from thine old St. Johns, Montgomery,
Still in mine ears the chimes will rise and fall
And in my heart, a peace, Montgomery,
Which first I found within its holy wall.

Far from thy stately grace, Montgomery,
Manners and customs of a bygone day —
I find no place to rest my heart, Montgomery,
To ease its hurt, or charm mad haste away.

Far from thy pillared homes, Montgomery,
Far from thy daughter whom I found so fair,
I find no love, afar, Montgomery,
Like to the love with which she blessed me there.

No beauty can I find the wide world over
But that which wakes a memory of thee.
My heart, like "Rachel for her children crying,"
Longs for Montgomery, Montgomery.

'Forest Dale,'' Burlington, Iowa, October, 1903.

A TOAST

O BONNY land of Dixie,
How can you be so gay!
How can your skies be soft and blue
When I am far away!

I thought your breezes whispered
So musically low —
I thought your flowers blossomed fair
Because I loved you so.

O bonny land of Dixie,
I would not selfish be.
I would not have you changed to all, —
Who never changed to me.

So while the north wind rushes
About my northern home,
I'll pledge you in a southern cup.
Lovers of Dixie, Come!

Hold high the fragrant julep
And drink this toast with me —
The fairest spot in Dixieland,
Montgomery!

'Forest Dale,'' Burlington, Iowa, October 1903.

THE BANJO BOY

DOWN the street, on a damp or shiny morning,
Comes the banjo boy, with happy smiling face;
And his black cheeks shine, all soap and water scorning,
And his white teeth gleam and glisten as he smiles with jaunty grace.

What matter if it rains or the sun be a-shining,
While your banjo still has a single good string?
What matter if you' re black? Who would be a-pining
While you own a whole banjo and a voice that will sing!

What matter if your jacket seems to need a little mending?
You can dance while the warm blood rushes through your veins.
You can tell it to your banjo, with loving touches sending
You a comfort and a balm for all your miseries and pains.

What matter if you're bad and are always
a-sinning?
You know, of course, you're not expected
to be white;
And the good God above will approve each
new beginning,
And He'll certainly excuse you if you don't
come out just right.

So you'll sing and dance if the day be
warm or chilling
And you hug your old banjo and make
it sweetly ring,
While your young pulse throbs and your
happy heart is thrilling;
For your dark hand is master here. Here you
are king!

Montgomery, Alabama, 1901.

EASTER EVEN

HOW the wind rushes cold from the
north and the east! To my ears
Comes the hiss of the snow and, with
it, the wail that one hears
In the autumn, when leaves lie a-dying and
summer is done.
It is Easter, they tell me, and spring; but no
warmth from the sun
Calls the sweet resurrection of bud and of leaf
and of flower.
The sun has gone south in his journey — too
far — and his dower
Of beauty and gladness and sunshine he leaves
with the land
Where hearts blossom forth like the spring-
time, and ever green stand.
O my South, O my South! All my heart calls
to you in its pain.
I can e'en shut my eyes — softly, so — I am
with you again.
In the woods of Montgomery, pines, tall and
straight, how they rise
From the dark mould beneath its pine needles.
The soft sunny skies
You can touch — in their nearness; they fold
you and warm you like wine.
And the flowers — all breathing out perfume;
the whole wood a shrine
Decked for feast day. The violets sway on
their long slender stems;

The scarlet verbenas unroll you a carpet of gems
Bright as rubies; the wild purple heart's-ease two petals unfold
All of velvet; and high, where the thick branches hold,
Hangs the wild honeysuckle, a wonder of pink and of white
And of yellow blooms, too, — dainty maids, softly tanned by the light;
But alone in their beauty, without a green leaf, white and tall,
Stand the pure Easter lilies — most gracious, most lovely of all.
As the gleams of the setting sun light the dark wood, I can hear
A song like a chant, far away — nearer now — then appear
Lines of brown dusky faces, then suddenly comes in their place
A procession of women and children of that happy race
Whose cares are like dewdrops that melt with the rise of the sun.
With soft step and stately, they come; for the long day is done
And high on each head balanced lightly, a basket of flowers,
Heaped and dropping, marks off all the length of the day's happy hours.

O my South, O my South, all so warm, all so dear, all so gay!
In spirit, I see you; in heart, I am with you to-day.

"*Forest Dale*" *Burlington, Iowa*, 1903

V

A SONG FOR THE NAVY

A LAUGH and a shout and a song, my lads,
As over the ocean we toss away!
The leap and the rock, the plunge and the shock
Of the ship is a glorious play, my lads,
Is wild and glorious play.

A laugh for the joy of the life, my lads —
A life like the change of the sea and sky!
Like Vikings we sail in the teeth of the gale.
We laugh and the winds reply, my lads,
In laughter, the winds reply.

A shout for the battle that's on, my lads,
And a cheer for Columbia, strong and free!
A shout for the fray that wins the day
And proves her queen o'the sea, my lads,
Queen o' the land and sea!

A song for the mother land, my lads —
The mother land of our loyal love!
We boast her the pride of the ocean side,
With old glory waving above, my lads,
Old glory forever above!

Then a laugh and a shout and a song, my lads,
A thought for home and a hand for the fight!
A life indeed is the life we lead
For Columbia, God, and the right, my lads —
Columbia, God, and right!

Keota, Oklahoma 1907.

A SONNET

THE wind sighed in the pine tree all night long
Like a tired spirit in some deep distress;
And through my heart, sighed, in dull bitterness,
A thousand fancies. An uncounted throng
They came — the sorrows that to them belong
Whose loved ones suffer while they powerless
Must stand, nor voice their helplessness
To the wide world that sees nor right nor wrong.

Only the agony and wakeful night
And sickened brain to meet the coming day!
Not for my cares nor for myself I pray
As now I kneel. But, with the dying light,
I lift my night prayer to the throne above
For those I love, O God, for those I love!

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 1903.

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